

Mid-Region Council of Governments

agribusiness connection

connecting farmers and markets in central New Mexico

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Contact Information

For more information about MRCOG's Agribusiness Collaborative, to get involved, or to suggest newsletter articles, please contact:

Randall Falkner
(505) 724-3623
rfalkner@mrcog-nm.gov

Ann Simon
(505) 724-3617
asimon@mrcog-nm.gov

Information about the Collaborative, its meetings, public events, and local agriculture issues can also be found at

AGBZ.NET

Whole Foods Goes Local

At the recent New Mexico Organic Farming Conference, Kenny Meyer, Rocky Mountain Office Buyer at Whole Foods Market, outlined a new philosophy at his company: local trumps all else.

This emphasis on foods from the host state is great news for our local farmers and ranchers. But how can a farmer or rancher with a small or even medium-sized farm operation access the gourmet retail food giant? We set out to get some answers.

"Yes," says Matt Herman, Marketing Director for the Albuquerque store, "we want to support the local growers and we know we have the client base to support sales, even higher-priced sales, of local produce." Herman confirms that purchases of local products, both fresh and value-added, are very important to the company right now as Whole Foods has placed a greater emphasis on purchasing local agricultural products and even giving individual stores license to find locally grown produce. And, this from the Whole Foods Market website: "We are permanently committed to buying from local producers...particularly those who farm organically and are themselves dedicated to environmentally friendly, sustainable agriculture."

However, each supplier to Whole Foods Market, not only has to be fully registered with the company (by applying in person or over the phone with Leonard Castillo at 856-0474), but also must carry a \$1

million liability policy. Although this seems a standard request for many large institutions and should come as no surprise given that Albuquerque Public Schools had the same policy, it seems a huge deterrent to many small farmers in our region.

To circumvent this, La Montanita Coop, which maintains four stores in New Mexico and supplies local products to many retail outlets, including Whole Foods, has an umbrella insurance policy under which smaller growers can fit.

If you are a small to medium-sized grower and are interested in selling to Whole Foods, Steve Warshawer, of La Montanita Coop, urges you to give him a call and he will walk you through the process. "We are looking for outstanding growers," he said. "We will work with them to understand what they want to grow and will then match the farmer with the market." That market may be Whole Foods.

INTERESTED IN THE PROGRAM?

Set up an appointment with the produce buyer at Whole Foods Market in Albuquerque by calling Leonard Castillo at (505) 856-0474.

Get in touch with Steve Warshawer at La Montanita Coop by calling (505) 470-4607 or by emailing him at steve@lamontanitacoop.com.



Read more about Whole Foods Market's program to support local produce at wholefoodsmarket.com/products/locallygrown/index.html.

Legislative Update

The New Mexico State Legislature is considering multiple bills that would positively affect local farmers and ranchers. Here are some highlights:

- \$110,000 has been included in HB2 for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Enhancement Program;
- \$100,000 has been included in HB2 to Promote and Develop Farmers Markets
- Sen. Dede Feldman's bill to provide NM grown fresh fruits and vegetables to the Valley high school cluster in the APS district was included in SB11 at \$85,000 as of March 7.

Check agbz.net for the status of all agriculture funding after March 17th.

Hoop House Workshop a success

Before the ground froze, but long after the vegetables died, Zoe Economou and her husband Claude Stephenson hosted a workshop on how to extend the growing season by building a hoop house. The workshop was conducted by Del Jimenez, an agriculture specialist at the New Mexico State University Agricultural Science Center in Alcalde, and Joren Viers, Bernalillo County Cooperative Extension. Approximately 15 winter growers-to-be attended the workshop and several used the knowledge gained to construct hoop houses of their own, including Zoe. For more information on constructing a hoop house for early spring plantings please call Joren at 243-1386.



The Customer Connection

By Joanie Quinn, New Mexico Organic Commodity Commission



**Make the
Customer
Connection:
Tell them who
you are!**



Much has been said in the last year about the importance of connecting with your customers. Studies have shown that customers want this connection and are willing to pay a premium, not only for the organic label, but also for products that are "local." How to effectively act on this information depends to a large extent on who your customers are and whether or not you have face-to-face contact with them.

Connecting to your customers can begin with a simple flyer that tells them about your farm. Customers want to know *where* you farm, *what* you grow, what your growing practices are, and *why* you grow the way you do. Do you have a long family history in the area? Perhaps your passion is getting the most nutritious food to market while it is at the peak of freshness, or growing delicious heirlooms that are no longer found in the markets, or restoring worn out land to health and diversity. Give people reasons (in addition to the great quality of the food you produce) to

support your farm.

If you are selling through a farmers' market or CSA, this farm story combined with lively conversation with your customers is often enough to forge a strong link.

This picture changes when you are not selling to the end-consumer, in which case that personal link is lost.

Consumers in a retail setting will be looking for some kind of assurance that they are supporting their values with their food dollars. Many times retailers are also looking for a shortcut to explain the value of the products they sell. This is when organic certification, and other types of differentiation become important in gaining both the best price for your product, as well as a loyal following of end-consumers.

Make sure the retail buyer knows your farm story, invite him/her out for a tour of your farm. This way, the retailer can become your advocate. Even in a retail situation, you can increase your sales through indirect communication with

your end-consumers. Look for retailers who are willing to post information about your farm and label your products with your farm name. Help make this easy for retailers by providing signage, copies of your farm story and offering to demo your products in the store.

And, if you are selling to a retailer or wholesaler, follow up to make sure your products are getting out to the consumers promptly and are being handled and merchandised well. A retailer who puts up signage about your farm, but is not getting your products out at their peak is not helping you. Find someone else.

No matter what your market, a retailer, wholesaler or the end-consumer, developing a good relationship—a reputation for reliability, fresh and delicious products, and clear communication—with your customer is critical. Know your markets and invite the feedback that will help you tailor your marketing to your customer.

What Should I Plant? — Part 2

By Dr. Jeff Bader, Bernalillo County Extension Director

In the last issue of this newsletter I talked about the challenges that come with beginning a farming operation, and some factors that should be considered before you till the soil. In this issue I would like to focus on one aspect of the planning process: **conducting an inventory**.

An inventory is particularly important if the farm is your sole source of income. As you record your assets, you will be able to begin to develop critical parts of your overall farm plan. You should inventory not only physical and monetary assets, but time and quality-of-life issues as well.

Physical - Cash, loans, land (a map of the farm and how it will be used), irrigation system, equipment, existing perennial crops, livestock etc.

Family - You must consider all family members and their stake and/or interest in the farming operation.

Lifestyle - Many people farm for the lifestyle not for the money. The lifestyle should not include working seven days a week and 365 days a year. A healthy farm depends on a healthy farmer, so you must plan ahead to spend time on other interests and with family and friends.

Estate - It is never too early to plan what will happen to the farm when you're gone. There are many excellent estate planning options for farmers

and ranchers today. This is particularly important if one of your main objectives is for the land to remain productive.

Retirement - Retirement and estate planning go hand-in-hand. Hopefully you will live beyond your ability to physically do the work. What will happen to the farm at that time? How much money do you really need to live? It is never too early to start.

OTHER RESOURCES

Building a Sustainable Business
- A Guide to Developing a
Business Plan for Farms and
Rural Businesses [http://
www.sare.org/publications/
business/business.pdf](http://www.sare.org/publications/business/business.pdf)

Marketing Strategies for
Farmers and Ranchers [http://
www.sare.org/publications/
marketing/index.htm](http://www.sare.org/publications/marketing/index.htm)

Personal Development - this is one aspect that many farmers neglect. Continuing to educate yourself, not only in best practices for the farm but in your communication, financial, and marketing skills, can help you become more successful.

For more information about business development or developing market strategies, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program is a good

place to start. SARE is a USDA program which provides grants and information to improve profitability, stewardship and quality-of-life of farmers and ranchers across the country. You can find them at sare.org.

Your local extension office, small business development center, and/or SCORE office (online at score.org) are also great resources for assistance with farm and financial planning. And, as always, you can contact me with any questions you may have.

small farm
business planning
&
marketing
series

CONTACT

Dr. Jeff Bader
Bernalillo County
Extension Director
jbader@nmsu.edu

How to sell Locally Grown Produce to Area Restaurants

MRCOG is working on a project to help local farmers and growers to develop marketing expertise in order to supply area restaurants with locally produced fruits and vegetables. This project is funded by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture under a grant from the Specialty Crops Program, and is intended to promote New Mexico agricultural products.

The project will:

- Identify locally owned restaurants interested in serving locally grown foods;
- Identify types and quantities of produce desired by local chefs

and prices they are willing to pay;

- Develop a confidential listing of local agricultural producers willing and able to supply products desired by the area restaurants; and
- Conduct a half-day workshop for local growers to build marketing expertise and develop a process for providing locally grown produce to area restaurants.

For more information on this project and ways to get involved, please contact Ann Simon (see contact info to right).



Save the Date!

**Workshop on How to Sell to Restaurants.
April 23, 2007 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
At the Mid-Region Council of Governments**

Come to this half-day workshop on how to access Albuquerque's more than 50 locally-owned restaurants. Hear from chefs, buyers and those already selling to the restaurants on the best way to get your foot in the door. Meet the chefs and owners. Get the inside scoop. Admission is free but RSVP is required. Please contact Ann Simon at asimon@mrco-nm.gov or call 724-3617 to register.

Meet the Farmer



Cecilia Rosacker McCord

Location of Farm:
Lemitar



Meet the Farmer: Cecilia Rosacker McCord

Q What will you grow in the spring and when do you plant?

A I begin my spring garden in mid-February/early March. My plantings include peas, baby lettuces, spinach, turnips, parsnips, leeks, chard, beets, carrots, brassicas (mustards, kales, etc.), and arugula. In early March I plant my transplants in a greenhouse (eggplants, peppers, and tomatoes).

Q What do you like most about farming?

A Feeding the people in my community. It gives me great pleasure to grow for them a unique variety of the freshest, most nutritious, most flavorful produce. I enjoy trying rare and heirloom varieties of vegetables, and expanding my customers' knowledge and palate. And there is nothing more rewarding than the magic of planting seeds, adding water, love, and persistent hard work.

Q Where do you sell your crops?

A I sell at the Downtown Market and the Socorro Market, and sometimes at the Nob Hill Market. I also sell to La Montanita Coop and sometimes to Sunflower Market in Corrales, and Whole Foods and the Marketplace in Santa Fe. Then there are my ever-faithful restaurant customers: Seasons,

Zinc, Artichoke Cafe, and Graze. These are my regular twice weekly customers. Working with their chefs is another one of the pleasures of my job.

Q How did you make your market connections?

A I simply knocked on doors and was able to provide a good product. My product is delivered or sold at market 3 to 24 hours after picking. It is always fresh and of high quality; it speaks for itself.

Q How do you protect your farm from development?

A I am the Executive Director of the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, a non-profit dedicated to preserving NM's working farms and ranches, open space, and wildlife habitat. We use conservation easements: voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and RGALT that limits commercial development and sprawl. Our immediate focus is to work with local and state governments to implement agriculture preservation programs to compensate farmers financially for their development rights, providing them an alternative to selling their water or property rights to developers.

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809 Copper Ave. NW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-247-1750